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GOP Congress and FEC Working Together on Campaign Reform

June 30, 2000

Republican Members
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Colleague:

Often overlooked in discussions about campaign finance reform are the far-reaching changes that have occurred in disclosure and enforcement law as a result of initiatives taken by the Republican Congress. Working with the Federal Election Commission (FEC), the Committee on House Administration and the House Appropriations Committee have cooperated closely to reform campaign laws by increasing information available to the American people and by streamlining the process of enforcing the current election laws.

The most dramatic reform has been electronic filing ("e-filing") of campaign contribution and spending information. In 1995, Congress passed legislation that required the FEC to accept e-filing of campaign finance reports. The initial phase of the e-filing system is already complete, and the number of election committees filing reports electronically is skyrocketing! The public can now access disclosure information submitted electronically within 24 hours. In response to legislation passed in the 106th Congress, the FEC will be ready to enforce mandatory e-filing for major filers for reporting periods beginning after December 2000.

The Republican Congress has also passed legislation requiring that all information submitted to the FEC from campaigns be put on line for public scrutiny. Whatever is filed with the FEC is now accessible more quickly and more conveniently to the American people.

Earlier this year in response to a suggestion from Congress, the FEC announced that decision documents from public meetings and requests for advisory opinions will now be posted on the FEC's website. One need only visit the website (www.fec.gov) to view campaign finance reports, download reporting forms, examine documents from open meetings, and research

election law. Material that once was available only in a law library or at FEC headquarters is now available to the public more readily.

To improve efficiency and speed up enforcement of election law, the Republican Congress in 1997 mandated a thorough, nonpartisan, independent management audit of the FEC. The agency, in cooperation with Congress, is now in the process of implementing numerous reform recommendations from the audit.

In order to make it easier for the public to see what candidates raise and spend each time they run for office, and in compliance with legislation passed by the 106th Congress, the FEC will standardize reporting of campaign finance data after December 2000 on an election-cycle basis rather than on a calendar-year basis. To streamline enforcement of election law, and also in compliance with legislation passed by the most recent Congress, the FEC this year will implement an administrative fine system for clear-cut disclosure violations, including failure to timely file reports. This system will eliminate expensive, time-consuming paperwork at the agency while preserving the right to an appeal.

In the past, if candidates violated election law, the FEC would have to initiate costly lawsuits. By late summer of this year, in conjunction with the Federal Mediation and Conciliation Service (FMCS), the FEC will have the option of using a mediator to facilitate the resolution of disputes with candidate committees in place of more formal, adversarial, lengthy, and usually expensive enforcement procedures.

More changes are coming this year. For instance, a high speed communication line to enable the Senate to transmit its filing directly to the FEC has been installed and should be functional by next month. The FEC will continue with a modernization of its computer systems and a review of electronic security measures so that data about campaign contributions cannot be violated by computer "hackers."

The constructive working relationship between the Congress and the FEC in the areas of information technology and simplified enforcement procedures shows how government can improve itself through cooperation and strategic thinking. As a result of the efforts of the Republican Congress, the FEC is less bureaucratic and more accessible to the public. Now, the American people can have more confidence in and information about the process of electing our nation's leaders.

If you have questions or comments, please contact the Committee on House Administration at (202) 225-8281.

Best Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Bill Thomas". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Bill Thomas
Chairman

WMT:pst